



National Association of Women Lawyers®

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October 25, 2004

Name of African Head of State

Address

Country

Dear [Name of African Head of State]:

I am writing you on behalf of the National Association of Women Lawyers ("NAWL"), a leading voluntary association of women lawyers and jurists based in the United States. In cooperation with women's coalitions around the world, NAWL works toward the social, political, and professional empowerment of women, seeks to end discrimination and violence against women and to prevent the erosion of hard-fought gains.

NAWL urges your government to ratify the Protocol on the Rights of African Women (hereinafter, "Protocol"). [Name of Country] is among the Protocol's signatories. The African Union adopted the Protocol on the Rights of African Women on 11 July 2003 as a supplement to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights and since that time, thirty-one members of the African Union have signed it. [Name of Country] signed the Protocol on [date this country signed the Protocol] evidencing its commitment to the Protocol. [Name of Country]'s signature on the Protocol indicates its belief that women's rights are human rights, and the citizens of [Name of Country], both male and female, expect and depend on your action to implement the Protocol. It is now time to take the next step and ratify the Protocol.

Human rights are not Western or Eastern ideals or other foreign concepts, but are intrinsically human in nature. The African Charter on Human and People's Rights, the African Union Constitution and related Declaration of Good Governance and the New Partnership for Africa's Development Process exemplify the Continent's commitment to human rights. Additionally, the existence of the African Court on Human and People's Rights and its commitment to gender equality in nominating its judges supports this notion. In ratifying the Protocol, [Name of Country] along with other African nations will enhance the progress made in guaranteeing human rights to all African citizens and further the practice of ensuring dignity for all people.

The Protocol is a means to achieve basic human rights for women; a group that has been disproportionately denied such essential entitlements. The Protocol offers a wide range of political, social, cultural, and economic rights for women. For example, under the Protocol, women receive protection from discrimination in the workplace and home, harmful cultural practices, and exploitation. Among the rights that the Protocol grants women are the right to life, integrity and security of person; equality in marriage and divorce; access to

the judicial system and participation in the political process; the right to a peaceful existence; the opportunity for education; economic freedoms; and health and reproductive rights. Further, the Protocol provides mechanisms for interpreting and enforcing these rights, providing a procedure for women to bring grievances for violations of these rights.

Despite the thirty-one signatures to the Protocol, the Protocol's ratification is necessary to guarantee that the rights granted are implemented and enforced. The Protocol will not enter into force until at least fifteen instruments of ratification are deposited with the Chairperson of the Commission of the African Union. Ratification ensures that each signatory has effected the appropriate state specific forums and processes for approving the Protocol. This is a pivotal opportunity for [Name of Country] to take the lead in the ratification process and motivate fellow African Union members to act likewise.

Ratification, while improving the lives of all African women, will benefit individual nations as a whole. Women are central to the African family and are the first educator of the children. Uplifting the condition of African women enhances the lives of all Africans. As Djibouti's First Lady Kandra Mahamoud Haid explained, "The challenges of underdevelopment cannot be overcome unless by the joint efforts of all, men and women alike." National Committee on Human Rights (UNFD) Interview with First Lady Kandra Mahamoud Haid, July 8, 2004, *available at* <http://www.pambazuka.org/index.php?id=24159>.

Providing women with the protections that the Protocol affords would strengthen [Name of Country] families. Under the Protocol, both parents would become more involved in raising and interacting with their children, increasing each child's support system and allowing parents to share responsibilities. In addition, both parents would receive workplace benefits, such as medical insurance, of which the entire family could take advantage. Consequently, families may become more stable as two parents care for the children and family economics rather than one.

Moreover, the rights that the Protocol grants would bolster the [Name of Country] economy and in turn the greater African economy. The Protocol provides women with the opportunity to become more educated and participate more actively in the workforce. When free from discrimination and harassment, women, especially educated women, are more productive workers and can contribute to [Name of Country]'s economy and advancement to a greater extent.

By ratifying the Protocol and taking a necessary step toward women's rights, [Name of Country] and Africa will serve as a world leader in gender equality. In moving toward a partnership between men and women and sending a message to the international community that the protection of women's rights is a priority, Africa will serve as an example in the advancement of gender equality. The world's citizens look to Africa's implementation of the Protocol as they seek solutions in their own countries. In addition, an improved human rights record may open doors to more trade opportunities and international cooperation on various issues.

For these reasons, NAWL encourages and asks your government to ratify the Protocol as soon as possible and seeks your assistance in overseeing the ratification process to completion. Only through ratification can African women fully contribute to [Name of Country], African, and the world society.

Sincerely,
The National Association of Women Lawyers